

VZCZCXYZ0014
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDG #0734/01 1331635
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 121635Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0703
INFO RUMISTA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000734

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR TRYAN, CWARD; DRL: INR; H
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [DR](#)
SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC REQUESTS RELIEF FROM LEAHY
DELAYS

¶1. Summary. Embassy notes with understanding the tremendous volume of Leahy vetting requests that must be processed by the Department -- Embassy itself has submitted 66 requests for over 460 individuals so far in FY 08, and submitted 82 requests for 635 individuals and 1 military unit in FY 07 -- and Embassy thanks its desk officers for expediting requests to the extent possible, but Embassy must nevertheless note that marked delays in the processing of its Leahy vetting requests are jeopardizing USG work designed to protect the homeland through fostering the rule of law, promoting human rights, preventing terrorist activity, and combating narcotics trafficking in the Dominican Republic. Accordingly, Embassy proposes that steps be taken to speed processing of Leahy vetting requests from the Dominican Republic. End Summary.

Rank-order and poor staffing damage programming

¶2. From conversations with Department officials, Embassy understands both DRL and INR processing of requests to be based on a prioritized country-ranking and that the Dominican Republic falls significantly toward the bottom of both bureaus' lists; this is despite the fact that Embassy is the third highest recipient of IMET funding in the Americas, following only El Salvador and Colombia. Embassy understands, moreover, that INR processing (at least for the Dominican Republic) is largely done by a single part-time employee who works but 2 days per week. Embassy's placement in the rank-order for processing, combined with what Embassy views as severely inadequate Department staffing, has significant consequences.

¶3. Embassy has been told that every attempt will be made to process requests within 10 working days of receipt, but has noted repeated delays of several months in processing -- but one example is the roughly 120 working day gap between the submission of our request in 2007 SANTO DOMINGO 863 (April 17, 2007) and the Department's response in STATE 144409 (October 15, 2007). In other examples the gaps are equal or nearly as significant: roughly 120 working days between the submission of 2007 SANTO DOMINGO 986 and the Department's response in 2007 STATE 147432; roughly 50 working days between the submission of 2007 SANTO DOMINGO 2422 and the response in STATE 1684, etc. In a recent trend, and likely in an effort to speed response, Embassy has begun receiving back channel notification of vetting approvals, but, as the 60 working day response time for SANTO DOMINGO 130 (sent January 8, 2008) suggests, this is not a perfect solution. Moreover, partner agencies such as SOCSOUTH require front channel confirmation of clearance.

¶4. While these excessive delays, admittedly, occur infrequently, and while desk officers and both DRL and INR

have often responded positively to Embassy's last minute entreaties, the fact that these gaps do occur, and the fact that the typical gap is now roughly 20 working days (still outside the Department's own guidelines), provides ample evidence of the larger problem the Embassy faces.

¶5. In terms of real world impact, delays have caused the Embassy more than just inconvenience: delays have prevented the training of key individuals with time-sensitive schedules, have put the Embassy's Military Advisory and Assistance Group at risk for thousands of dollars in penalties when students were unable to travel for U.S.-based military training, and, in the case of SOCSOUTH, have forced the cancellation of critical 1206-funded training needed to protect the homeland and U.S. citizens resident and visiting from the threat of terrorist attack.

Proposals

¶6. Embassy recognizes that many countries are critical to the security of the United States and of its citizens abroad, but suggests that, given the 1 million annual U.S. visitors to the Dominican Republic, the 100,000 U.S. citizens resident, the small geographic distance between the Dominican Republic and the United States (80 miles across the Mona Passage), the criticality of the Dominican Republic to the U.S. Southern Command's plan to secure the southern approaches to the continental United States (recognizing the Dominican Republic to be a functional "third border"), and the increasing flow of illegal narcotics through Hispaniola to the United States (over 100 metric tons annually), that the Dominican Republic is such a country.

¶7. Embassy requests that the Dominican Republic be considered a high-priority country for all Bureaus involved in Leahy vetting processing and that Embassy's submissions be expedited.

¶8. Embassy further suggests that, despite the grave budget situation facing the Department, it is of critical importance to increase staffing dedicated to the processing of Leahy vetting.

¶9. Considering that vetting to date has not discovered significant human rights violators among Embassy's proposed individuals, as well as the marked improvement in the human rights situation in the country over the past several years, Embassy further suggests that the Department may wish to consider the Dominican Republic for the next tranche of "fast-track" countries.

¶10. Embassy welcomes Department's response to this problem and any proposed solution.

FANNIN